Forest Health Notes

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Low Southern Pine Beetle Activity Predicted for Public and Private Forestlands in North Carolina in 2012

The North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) attempts to predict southern pine beetle (SPB) population levels each spring through pheromone-baited insect traps. Trap data is included in a model developed by the Texas Forest Service to provide early SPB population predictions based on the ratio of SPB to their primary predator, the clerid beetle, as well as other factors. Every NCFS district in the state assisted with the trapping efforts this year and the NCFS Forest Health Branch would like to extend our thanks to the districts and counties involved.

The SPB surpasses all other forest pests for the amount of damage it has caused to pine forests in the past and periodic outbreaks occur on a regular basis over the majority of our state. Last year, SPB activity was again low with no confirmed spots reported in the state.

This year, trapping data indicate another low year for populations of SPB in North Carolina as well as many southern states. In fact, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee did not catch a single SPB during their spring trapping. In addition to Tennessee, our other border states are also predicted to have continued low populations of SPB this year with the following exception:

Virginia: Appomattox/Buckingham County

Appomattox/Buckingham County is predicted to see a slight increase in SPB activity this summer, with overall populations remaining low.

Though low SPB populations are predicted, we need to continue to be on the lookout for localized and sporadic infestations, as they could occur anywhere in the state. Activity is most likely in pine stands that are overstocked, overmature or stagnant, or have poor soil drainage. Forests affected by littleleaf disease, annosus root rot, and other causes of tree stress may also be susceptible to SPB infestation.

The NCFS recommends the use of sound silvicultural practices to prevent SPB damage and encourages landowners to thin overcrowded pine stands (young stands with more 700 trees/acre or older stands with more than 120 square feet per acre of basal area). Proper stocking levels promote healthy stands that can better withstand attacks from SPB. The NCFS continues to provide Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program cost-share funds (funded through a grant from the USDA Forest Service) for pre-commercial thinning of pine stands to give them a healthy start and to aid in the prevention of future of SPB outbreaks.

This publication was published in Portable Document Format (PDF) to inform and educate NCFS personnel and other forestry interests about health issues affecting North Carolina forest resources.